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Rider-Lewis (later Nyberg Automobile) Motor Car Company
Anderson
Madison County
Indiana

Photographs and
Written and Historical data

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Engineering Record
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Rider-Lewis (later Nyberg Automobile) Motor Car Co.

HAER IN-38

Location:	North side of West Second Street at Sycamore. UTM: 16.610950.441010 Quad: Anderson South
Date of Construction:	1909
Present Owner:	Force Corporation
Significance:	The Rider-Lewis Motor Car Company was one of the last firms brought to Anderson by the Commerical Club, a civic group which attempted to meet regional economic decline with local initiatives. The factory buildings, which survived the decline of the automobile manufacturing companies, stand as proof of their adaptability as industrial structures.
Historians:	Robert Rosenberg Donald Sackheim

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Anderson, along with many other cities in east-central Indiana, enjoyed a period of rapid and dramatic growth following the discovery of huge fields of natural gas in the last decades of the nineteenth century. With the depletion of inexpensive fuel supplies at the beginning of the twentieth century, the economy of the region declined.¹ The Commercial Club of Anderson, organized in 1905, met the crisis by attracting new industry to the city. The Rider-Lewis Motor Company was one of the last firms brought to Anderson by the Commercial Club.

Rider-Lewis shared several characteristics with the DeTamble Motors Company, the first firm brought to Anderson by the Commercial Club. Both companies manufactured automobiles, both went bankrupt, and both used single-story design in the construction of their factories. While single-story construction was not unique in the automobile industry at the time, it was progressive, and the fact that the buildings survived long after the firms that built them went bankrupt attests to their adaptability as industrial structures. The Rider-Lewis factory is an example of simple utilitarian construction used in Indiana at the turn of the twentieth century.

On 13 October 1908 representatives of the Rider-Lewis Motor Car Company signed a contract with the factory committee of the Commercial Club to locate the automobile plant in Anderson. Rider-Lewis, which employed 175 men at the time of the move to Anderson, had been located in a small unsanitary factory in Muncie. The opportunity to move to new quarters with help from Anderson's business community was probably enough of an incentive to transfer the operations, although a cash bonus may have changed hands as it did in the case of DeTamble Motors in 1908.² The site chosen for the factory was between Second and Sycamore Streets in the Evylan addition, a property owned by Mr. Harter.

The brick factory was erected by Clifton and Sons of Peru, Indiana at a cost of about \$35,000. The building was completed, and the company went into operation sometime between 1 July and 1 October 1909. By June 1910, the company was turning out four-cylinder autos at the rate of 30-40 per week with a labor force of about 150 men.

The Rider-Lewis Company had been in operation only about a year before it met with serious financial problems. In 1910, the Superior Court appointed Thomas J. DeLaHunt receiver for the company. Newspaper accounts blamed the company's financial problems on heavy losses caused by a late start in the selling season and the demands for payment by a few insistent creditors.³

From mid-September 1910 through January 1911, the factory was run by the creditors. On 7 December 1910 Judge Austill of the Superior Court ordered the sale of the property of the Rider-Lewis Company to be conducted on or before February 1, 1911.

Advertisements were placed in trade journals and newspapers, but only two bids were submitted before the sale was closed. The high bid of \$40,000 was submitted by a Chicago syndicate, which proved unable to raise the money. The factory was sold to Henry Nyberg, a Swedish born Chicagoan. Nyberg intended to re-open the plant and continue automobile production.

Nyberg took possession of the plant on 7 March 1911, after an initial payment of \$5,000. He contracted to buy the factory in eight monthly installments of \$5,000.

On 30 March 1911, the old Rider-Lewis factory, now called the Nyberg Automobile Company, was producing its first automobiles under Nyberg's direction. Nyberg had worked as a foreman and superintendent at the Rambler Auto Company before going into business for himself in Chicago. On 14 April 1911, he filed articles of incorporation, calling his firm the Consolidated Automobile Company.

On 24 September 1912, Nyberg told the Anderson Morning Herald that he would probably be forced to leave Anderson because the existing plant was too small. Apparently plans were made, and construction begun, on an addition at the beginning of December.

Business appears to have been satisfactory throughout 1913, but on 13 January 1914, C.H. Henderson, Nyberg's sales manager, announced to the local newspaper that a plan which had been devised to save the firm from receivership had failed. After declaring bankruptcy, Nyberg found a backer--A.C. Barløy of Streaton, Illinois--and bid to recapture his firm once its debts were erased. On 16 February the Nyberg Automobile Works were sold at auction to the sole bidder, Henry Nyberg. He resumed control of the plant and on 23 March 1915 the factory again began to produce automobiles.

Rider-Lewis: The Building

The Rider-Lewis factory building, located between Second and Sycamore Streets in the Evalyn addition, is a utilitarian building of simple design and brick construction. Its southern section, the main part of the building, measures 420 x 56 feet with two ells, parallel to each other, running to the north of the main structure, and measuring 80 x 32 feet. Total floor space of the factory is approximately 31,815 square feet.

A long course of unadorned windows, nine over nine, runs the length of the main building on both the northern and southern exposures. The small second story, located in the center of the main building, displays brick archwork on its second story windows and block arches with keys over the lower story windows, but overall the building is simple and unadorned. The roof of timber construction is supported by a modified two-span Howe truss.

Rider-Lewis Motor Car Company

Notes

- 1 R. Dee Rarick, "Petroleum and the Energy Crisis," 38
Outdoor Indiana (Sept. 1973) 4.
- 2 See HAER Report IN-36 and Indianapolis Star 27 December
1908 p. 5.
In January 1908, the Commercial Club adopted the "Watkins
Lot Plan" under which the Commercial Club was to secure
1200 vacant lots, sell them, and use the funds as a bonus
to induce new industry to locate in Anderson. The lots
were secured either by donation or taken on option.
- 3 Anderson Morning Herald, 11 September 1910, p. 1.
"The company suffered some heavy losses by not getting
started out soon enough for last year's business...
Insistent demands from just a few creditors have been the
source of the trouble."

Rider-Lewis Motor Car Company

Bibliography

The following newspaper accounts provided information about the Rider-Lewis Motor Car Company:

Anderson Morning Herald

11 July 1903 p. 1
3 October 1903 p. 1
13 October 1903 p. 1
22 November 1908 p. 8
7 January 1909 p. 1
2 June 1910 p. 8
4 September 1910 p. 1
11 September 1910 p. 1
13 September 1910 p. 1
16 September 1910 p. 1
17 September 1910 p. 1
28 September 1910 p. 1
7 December 1910 p. 1
11 January 1911 p. 1
20 January 1911 p. 1
26 January 1911 p. 1
31 January 1911 p. 1
22 February 1911 p. 1

The following newspaper accounts provided information about the Nyberg Automobile Company:

Anderson Morning Herald

1 March 1911 p. 1
7 March 1911 p. 3
19 March 1911 p. 1
30 March 1911 p. 10
14 April 1911 p. 1
10 September 1912 p. 8
24 September 1912 p. 8
3 December 1912 p. 1
13 January 1914 p. 1
23 January 1914 p. 1
17 February 1914 p. 1
20 February 1914 p. 7
26 February 1914 p. 4
23 March 1915